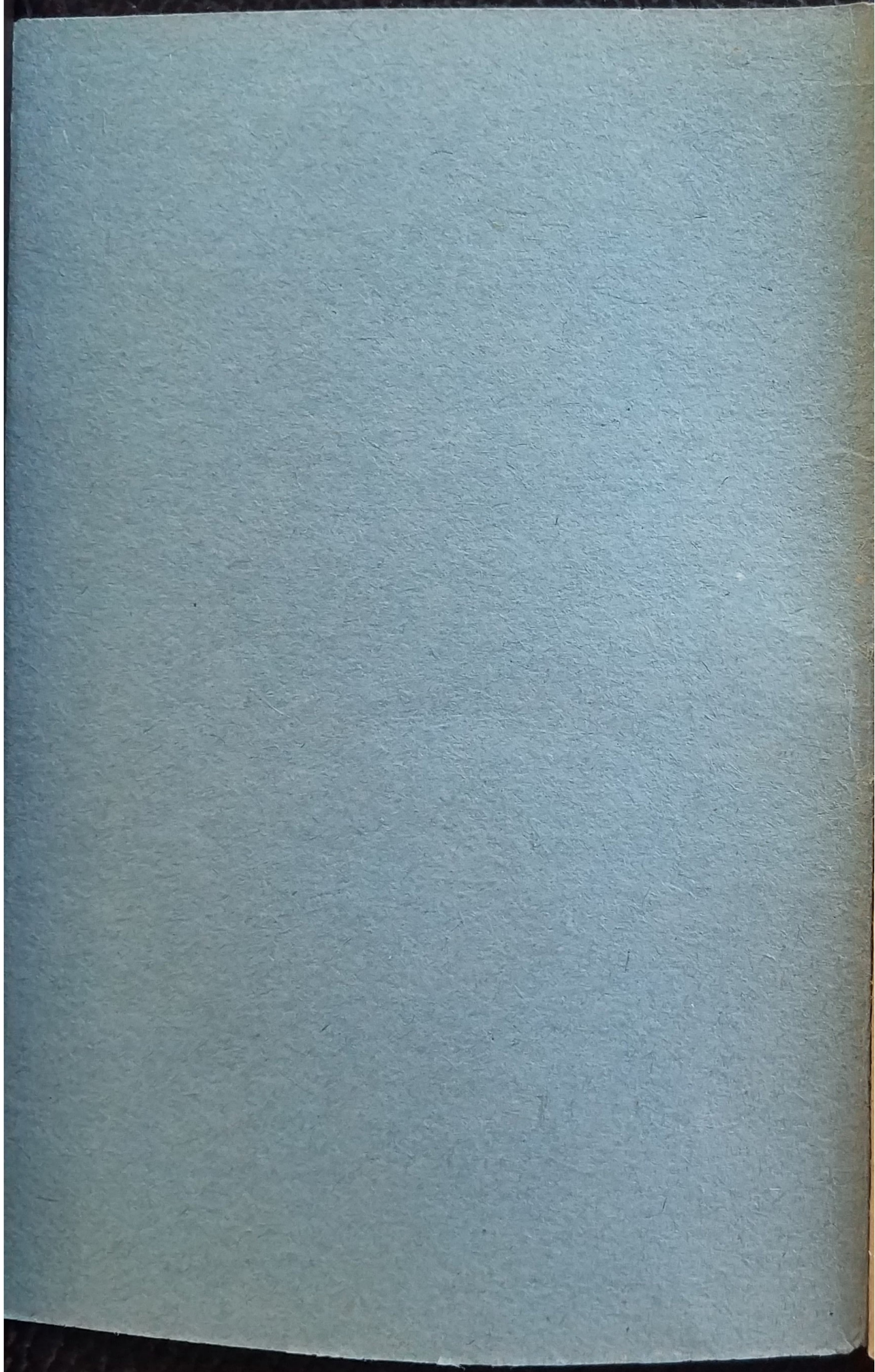


LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 755
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

**Life Among Hollywood's
"Extra" Girls**

Edgcumb Pinchon



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HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS
GIRARD, KANSAS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LIFE AMONG HOLLYWOOD'S "EXTRA" GIRLS

HOW THOUSANDS OF BEAUTIFUL GIRLS WAIT
FOR THEIR "BREAK"

EDGCUMB PINCHON.

She is a little Hungarian beauty—somber purple eyes, quaintly gabled black brows, the fluent figure of a rush, and lips, full, relaxed and red as a blown poppy. With her pleasant speech and gentle manners one might be excused for regarding her as the cherished child of some leisured and wealthy family. But she is the little "extra" girl who kindly volunteered to sit for this interview.

I chose her because she has every possible advantage an "extra" girl could have—brains, beauty, personality, a serious outlook on her work, a college education which did not seriously damage her, and a father who has enjoyed a considerable reputation as a character actor. While her earnings are a desirable addition to the family income she lives at home, a protected, cultivated life. Under the circumstances I felt that her report upon the "extra" girl and her problems would be not only well-informed but dispassionate and objective. But I hardly expected it would be so somber. Perhaps the fact that two of her less fortunate girl friends had committed suicide during the month, may have had something to do with the level sadness

of her voice; but, of course, it could not alter the appalling little bit of statistics she gave me; for she was quoting from the records of the Central Casting Bureau itself.

Here in brief is the "extra" girl situation. At the Central Casting Bureau of Los Angeles alone there are registered over 10,000 extras. About 6,000 of these are women and girls. And the daily average of employment is 210! That is to say that throughout the year for every girl that is employed there are 30 others who are not! This is the permanent situation.

The standard wage is \$7.50 a day, \$10 a day when very expensive clothes are required; for the extra girl must provide her own wardrobe and be ever ready at the ring of the telephone to appear on the "lot" dressed in smart morning, afternoon or evening gowns as required, or in up-to-date sport clothes. Of course she must keep on hand a variety of modish hats with shoes and hosiery to match—all this on \$7.50 a day now and then! In order to meet this impossible situation the girls work in little semi-cooperative groups, swapping clothes with each other as occasion requires.

Of these 6,000 aspirants for stardom (not one of whom but is convinced that she is an undiscovered Dolores Del Rio) some 2 or 3 per cent, in course of time, may obtain "bits" as the small character parts are called; and about one per cent of these again some day may see their names in "lights" before the movie portals. Such are the odds upon which these children gamble away their youth, their beauty, their

creative integrity and finally, in a vast number of cases, their womanhood!

And in the meantime, how do they live? In Taft's famous words—"God knows!" It is a canvass impossible to make without the instincts of a Sherlock Holmes; for "The Hollywood Spirit" is a smiling sprite, and a cheerful liar withal. These girls will not admit failure, difficulty nor defeat. It is a religion with them that "Nothing succeeds like the determined pretense of success"; and not until there is a sudden little flurry and the ambulance is called does the situation become plain. Two things, however, in this connection anyone may observe for himself: the waitress personnel of Hollywood is the most engaging in the world: the "extra" girl might be called "standard equipment" for the man with a smart roadster.

Few of them have the good sense of the dignified little person who manicures my nails. She left the comic opera stage for the "movies," a "bit" at fifteen dollars a day—and starry prospects. Unusually successful she obtained six "bits" of about ten days each the first eighteen months, a total earning of \$900; while her living expenses had come to more than twice as much. Badly in debt and facing another long "rest," she decided to become an expert manicurist. Now she owns her own home and drives a good car. Her tips alone come to more than \$2,000 a year. Sensible girl!

The trouble is that it is practically impossible to be an "extra" and be anything else at

the same time. Comes a ring at the telephone. Central Casting is calling. But Doris is filling in at a book-store. Casting directors cannot await the convenience of extras. Another girl is called and gets the job. A few experiences of that kind—and Doris is definitely out of the game. Of such is the waitress personnel. The extra must stay close to her telephone, have her costumes in order, and be as ready to respond to the signal as a fireman.

Moreover the life of an extra quickly unfits her for more genuine activities. For the formative years of life to be spent very largely in waiting and praying for luck is a disaster transcending any mere physical hardship. Girls who come to the work with minds already trained and balanced at least can fill their long leisure hours with some cultural pursuit; but for the others the days of hypnotic waiting, interspersed with little hysterical outbursts of joy when a few days' work is secured, breaks down the capacity for concentration and finally, often enough, the whole moral fiber itself. To such a meaningless, uncreative, uncoordinated life, the "gay party" comes as the only possible relief.

And these parties are often rather ugly affairs; for the girls are at a great disadvantage. They are hungry, if not actually for bread, then for romance or simply fun. Liquor, sometimes good, often vilely bad, pours in abundance. For if the first industry of Hollywood is the motion-picture, and the second real-estate, the third I strongly suspect is the noble craft of "bootlegging." Wine, whiskey, beer, and a particularly

wretched gin are privately in evidence everywhere; and here as elsewhere prohibition has merely served to create an impetus toward excessive drinking.

"But tell me," I said to the girl with the purple eyes, "what kind of girls make up this little army of six thousand extras?" "They are of every kind, of course," she replied, "but roughly they fall into three groups. First, there are the girls from good middle class homes having a fair education and a more or less serious outlook on their work. Then there are the 'rough-necks,' of the chorus girl and bathing beauty type, who mostly are employed by the companies producing the two-reel comedies. And finally there are the flocks of silly little girls from the small towns, chiefly of the Middle West, who come here with nothing but prettiness and romantic dreams. The first two classes, in entirely different ways, know how to take care of themselves more or less. It is among the third group that the most tragedy occurs."

As she spoke I recalled with a wince a little scene I had witnessed a few days previously. Mounting the stairs of a building devoted to motion-picture agencies I had been arrested by the pure childlike loveliness of a little girl of about fourteen who was floating down upon me. I say "floating" because her feet scarcely touched the stairs, while her face had that look of ingenuous rapture which comes of a childish dream fulfilled. With a start I noticed as she passed me the plain little gingham gown, and "cork-screw" curls. I did not know that

such "small-town" beauties existed any longer. Then I realized what had happened. Behind her, biting speculatively at the end of a cigar, came a leather-faced booking agent. He was eyeing her with such naive animality as would have been amusing under other circumstances. Quite evidently he had "engaged" her. It was one of those situations which are so obvious—and hopeless! Returning down the stairs after a few minutes I found her seated beside her new manager in a cheap sport-car. He was glancing down at her with the air of a bon vivant who leisurely appraises his steak before he eats it. She caught my eye, and immediately her little chin tilted, her face froze to what she imagined to be, I suppose, the correct hauteur of one about to become a famous "star." "Poor child," I thought, "I give you just twenty-four hours with your dreams!"

"How does a girl go about getting a job as an extra?" I asked. "In the first case she must register at the Central Casting Bureau in Los Angeles which engages practically all the extra performers for all the studios. She must file a good photograph of herself, and will be required to write on the back of it a few items of information, e. g., age, weight, color, height, extent of previous experience, if any; and also whether she can drive a car, ride horseback, swim, play golf, etc. Then after leaving her name, address and telephone number she simply goes home to wait—and wait. That is all. Of course it is well to go up to the Bureau now and again and keep them reminded of your presence on earth. But it is a rather trying

experience. So many are doing the same thing—with the same result: smiling promises.”

“And is that really all?” I asked. “No,” she said, “If a girl has a friend in one of the studios it will make a lot of difference. For instance, Central Casting sent me out to see the casting director at United Artists who are using a hundred girls in Mary Pickford’s new picture. But he told me that the whole hundred had been filled from a list of Mary Pickford’s personal friends! Friendships, politics and pull play just as big a part in the ‘movies’ as they do in the City Hall. Some girls who come with good introductions and make the most of them, and have a gift for the social thing as well as ability, get along quite well up to a certain point—but not beyond that. Nothing counts in the bigger parts but your box-office record. But extras are so comparatively unimportant that of ten girls applying for one job, granted fairly equal qualifications, it will be the one with the ‘drag’ who gets it.”

“But there are friendships of another color, too, are there not?” I asked. “Oh, yes,” she replied readily, “plenty of them; but they do not play as important a role as people outside of Hollywood often imagine. A girl can get a little superficial advancement from making herself the plaything of some man in power; but if she has not ability to back it up, nothing will come of it in the end. Moreover men tire of women they do not respect. One sees girls become suddenly prosperous overnight without any obvious reason; presently they obtain important ‘bits’ and seem headed for ‘stardom’;

but usually they do not go far. Of course a girl who insists on maintaining her self-respect will have to plod—until her chance comes; but then it is likely to be a permanent advance she will make."

"But do such chances ever come?" "That is the exasperating thing—they do!" she laughed. "Otherwise we would all quit tomorrow; for none of us are in the work for the love of it—only for the money or the prospect of it. There is just enough of the miraculous happens every day to keep us all in the gambling spirit. There is a great deal of difference between a job like stenography which offers absolutely no opportunity and one like being an 'extra' girl that offers some little opportunities at short odds and some big ones at long odds."

"Tell me," I said finally, "just what you would do if you were king to improve the lot of the extra girl?" "I used to think that while very little can be done for the girls who are already in the game something might be done to prevent the odds of employment rising from 25 to 1 to 100 to 1 against." "How?" I queried. "By educating the public to the conditions here," she replied. "But now," with a weary little laugh, "I know better." She saw I was about to protest and raised her hand with a sphinx-like expression. "Listen," she said, "of the five thousand girls registered at Central Casting there is not one who does not secretly feel that, point for point, she is just as good-looking and just as magnetic as any star you can mention. Many of them will never get even an extra job, ninety percent will never

have even a 'bit,' but each girl expects to be the exception, and no power on earth can convince a woman against her vanity! And that is a new dilemma for the practical philosopher!"

We were seated in one of the alcoves which abound in the beautiful Studio Club. Built with a processed concrete which looks like fine old marble, and nobly proportioned, with an immense dining hall and one of the finest club theaters in America, it is practically the gift of a group of wealthy society women and motion-picture stars to the "extra girl." Mary Pickford plays a prominent part in its direction and contributes handsomely towards it. Here a girl can have the luxury of an unusually good residential club for the modest sum of eleven dollars a week, including board and the use of the up-to-date laundry. Since the accommodation is quite limited, girls are allowed to stay only one year so that the club shall not become the prerequisite of a clique.

As I bade good-bye to my charming little host and sped, somewhat abashed, through the throng of slender, vivid, challenging girlhood in the corridors, I could feel physically the keen vibration of pain about me. And I remember that two such as these had killed themselves but a week or two ago.

And I know perfectly well that not a word I have said will leave the faintest impress on the young miss who is even now packing her trunk bent on entering into serious competition with Greta Garbo. And that in a nutshell is the origin of the extra girl—and of her manifold problems.

THE HOLLYWOOD I KNOW

STORIES OF THOSE WHO ARE WAITING AND
THOSE WHO HAVE "CRASHED"

EDGCUMB PINCHON

Hollywood is a something in mid-career. What it was twenty years ago I know. It was a charming, sleepy, garden village. What it will be when it has achieved a rounded personality, such as is possessed by London, New York, Paris, or Vienna, I cannot guess. What it is now none may describe with any real truth. It is as though all the grotesque contradictions that make up the merry mask of life were here thrown into the starkest juxtaposition.

There is nothing that you can say of Hollywood at present which would not be a lie and a truth at the same time. It is stupidly vicious and cruel. It is amazingly innocent and friendly. It is the very capitol of dullness and ignorance. It is a veritable gypsy-camp of culture and genius. It is the mecca of the parvenus. It is the abode of taste and distinction. It is dollar-mad. It is scornful of gain and is full of astoundingly modest talent.

It is all true, as indeed, in lesser measure, such contradictory statements are true of any cosmopolitan community. But the baffling thing about Hollywood is that one might live in it a week or five years, and really come into contact with only one or two of these aspects; and sincerely come to base his view upon

these. For Hollywood is at least five communities intermingled, and yet hardly touching each other.

First there are the villagers, not unlike the rather dull, kindly, self-satisfied people of any small town. Then there are the extras, motliest crowd in the world, ranging from Russian noblemen to Texas cowboys, from Viennese beauties to little scared girls from Iowa and Missouri, nymphs and fat women, giants and dwarfs, men with beards and men with hunch-backs, "types" of everything in human nature. They are a race apart yet interpenetrating the whole life of the community. The economic common denominator of three dollars a day (from seven to ten, with costume or long experience)—when working, gives them a certain unity, a camaraderie of friendliness, recklessness, destitution and hope. O that hope! It is a drug outranking morphine. Without it Hollywood could not exist a day.

Then comes the smaller but very distinctive community of the "intelligentsia" of the movies, the craftsmen, decorators, sculptors, artists, musicians, writers, specialists in lighting problems, cameramen, architects, research experts, special directors (military, dance, society, oriental), the costume designers, an almost endless list of those who are proficient in one or other of the many arts and sciences which go to the making of the completed motion-picture. Back of every star stands a silent phalanx of hundreds of these talented, trained men and women, among them many a vivid genius, drawn from all the ends of the earth—

Italian, French, Spanish, English, German, Russian, Roumanian, Hungarian, Austrian, predominating over the native American. These too, form a race apart, knit by a common bond of hard creative work, mutual tastes and social standards. For the most part they are well paid. But for every one who is "on the lot" you will find several who are not.

Finally comes the "uppercrust," the producers, directors and "stars." Of great wealth, and sometimes of great ability also, they cultivate expensive tastes, maintain large establishments and tend to exclusiveness—partly, it must be said, as a sheer necessity; for a throng of movie aspirants of one sort or another swarm about them like ants around honey.

How difficult it is for even close personal friends of the headliners to reach them the following little tale will illustrate. To give stories of this kind without mentioning names is rather nonsense, so I will beg everybody's pardon to begin with.

Emma Dunn, the immortal "mother" in *Peer Gynt*, and in *"Old Lady Thirty-One,"* perhaps the greatest character actress we have today, was visiting Hollywood recently and wished very much to see her life-long friend and former stage "daughter," Mary Pickford. Innocently she wrote her note. There was no answer. She had written to the studio. She then appealed to me. I gave her Mary Pickford's private address, not without misgivings; and she wrote again. A third letter, marked "personal and important," had no better fate. Finally I asked Emma Dunn to write another

note and give it to me. I took it personally to Mark Larkin, Douglas Fairbanks' publicity man, an old and valued friend; and he gave it personally to Mary. Thereafter "mother" and "daughter" had the merriest times together; but it took just that much of direct personal contact to make it possible.

The crowding of those who desperately seek a foothold in the industry has become such that it is harder to get into a producing studio than to get into the President's private office, harder to see a director, even with scores of introductory telegrams, than to see King George; and it has become an unwritten and bitterly enforced social code that no one "in" shall personally introduce to producer, director or star, anyone "out" whose acquaintance has not been requested.

I hope, however, that I have not conveyed the impression that there exists anything beyond a natural and rather indefinable tendency to groups among the Slaves of the Mirror. In general they are a wonderfully human and democratic crowd. Naturally like seeks like; but that is only a display of personal taste; naturally also economic distinctions play a subtle role; but apart from the almost imperative seclusiveness of the hounded "upper crust" there is amazingly little snobbery apparent. What there is you will find mostly among the feminine "stars." But that, too, is reasonable. When one is trying to maintain a giddy elevation with nothing but one's face to maintain it on, an assumption of something or other must be made.

While "on the lot," professional distinctions are sometimes maintained (but just as often not); socially all barriers fall. But whereas you will not find extras in the homes of producers, nor vice versa, you will often find both extremes mingling in the homes and studios of the "intelligentsia." They are the real fusing force in the social whole of Hollywood life. An amusing and rather happy indication of the general atmosphere is the almost universal use of the given name. It is a bit startling to hear a cameraman call a famous director "Bill," or hear the director himself shout "Nellie" to a five-thousand-dollar-a-week star; but it belongs to "the movies" and like the expression, "on the lot" (so reminiscent of early days when studios were nothing but fenced vacant lots rented at \$10 a month), will probably stay.

What I have said is merely to give a sort of intelligible background upon which to paint such bits as make up my own individual experience here. Nothing but the actual working and struggling in this small-town-metropolis and industrial gypsy camp of the arts can really give one a true view of its life.

The visitors see an obvious angle or two, not more. They will go to Grauman's Egyptian theater on first nights and watch the throng of "fans" waiting fervently to catch a glimpse of the "stars," duly announced by megaphone and the blowing of bugles plus the kindly services of a spotlight! They will pay five dollars for a seat and try to imagine that the picture is worth it or at least the gaudy prologue of vaudeville and pageant. They may visit the

Bowl and marvel at this spectacle of 40,000 people seated, silent as mice, under the lonely stars, and in total darkness, listening to the symphonies of Beethoven, Shubert, Schumann and Dvorak. Or in an adjoining canyon they may see how the Hollywood spirit has turned the hills into a backdrop and used a knoll as a stage for its local version of the Passion Play. They may drive through the highlands and speculate on the cost of the parvenu palaces of the new aristocracy of moviedom; and finally they may, with good luck, get "on the lot" for an hour or two and see Tom Mix gallop or Douglas Fairbanks fight. And that is all. It is a phase of Hollywood; but by no means the most significant. It is in the inner life that one finds a veritable Alice-in-Wonderland, a life so full of the incredible, the fantastic, the comically ironic that presently, wonder-exhausted, one yields to it passively as in a dream.

For instance, a famous Swedish director was waiting for a street car. Hovering nervously near him was a little man the very image of Charlie Chaplin in his stage outfit. He clutched a bundle of manuscript. The car approached. The little man, wetting his lips with fear, seized on the director. "Can I speak with you? I have a scenario." The director gave him one swift comprehending look and swinging on the car called back: "Tomorrow at four at the Plaza hotel."

The little Greek peddler of jam, for such he was, went home ecstatic. The next day at five he was crumpled, weeping, exhausted but

happy. For an hour he had been acting out his whole scenario to the director in the limits of an hotel bedroom. And now the director was weeping also. "Get that down on paper—just what you have told me, nothing more. Bring it to me tomorrow," said the director.

Again the maker of jam went home with palpably sprouting wings. The next day he returned with a mass of incoherent sentimental verbosity, in perfectly accurate English, but impossible to read or describe. It was at this stage that I was called in. Would I try to get this story into brief coherent shape? I took one glance at the first page and said noncommittally that I would try. Another room was engaged. Here for a week we wrestled together. Every time he told the story it was a new one. He would try to tell it to me and get lost in a rant of sentimentality. "Act it, man," I would cry in despair. And in a moment he would have me gripped as I seldom have been. But that was all. No central clue, idea, theme, could I find, nothing which had the basis for a logical plot. Episodes, nothing else. Somehow I edited and united these into a semblance of dramatic content. The manuscript was rejected. Then I took myself off and wrote a new story logically conceived out of the dawning central idea, or such ghost of it as I could detect. The manuscript was approved. That was all. Nothing has happened, nothing ever will. The Greek version of Charlie Chaplin is still peddling iams, and dreaming of conquests to come. The director is abroad. I got a check for \$250 from

the director, and a pot of jam from the peddler. Voila!

Many stories I could tell of those who wait at the gates. It is these who give to Hollywood its undertone of heartbreak. They are legion. The high salaries, the glittering chances, the provocative life offered by the motion-picture industry makes competition in its every department keener than in any other industry in the world. A million-dollar national campaign with the slogan "Keep away from Hollywood!" would probably be the most beneficent enterprise any modern philanthropist could embark upon. Every train brings fresh battalions pledged to "crash the gates." Not one in a hundred who come has an even chance of finding a foothold. And this is just as true of the trained, the competent, the expert, the genius, as it is of the rawest little "screen-struck" lass from Arkansas, or the local matinee ideal from Scootville.

And yet the exasperating truth is that the unlikeliest of the hundred, having gotten a toehold, may climb all Olympus in a year or two.

Among my own little group of personal friends, for instance, are: an actress, highly prized on the German and Jewish stages; a New York actor, one of Broadway's most popular juvenile leads; a brilliant Russian technician in the arts and sciences of the motion-picture, once holding a high position under the Bolshevist government; an innovator in the science of movement and the art of the dance, who numbers among her pupils Emma Dunn,

Belle Bennett, Florence Vidor, Vera Reynolds, Katherine MacDonald and Mrs. James K. Hackett, and a German director who has done excellent work in Berlin. All of these are highly gifted, well trained specialists in their respective lines; all of them have waited at least one year, some of them two, for the gates to open. It well may be that some of them never will see those gates from the other side. That is the way it goes.

And with this almost universal experience of waiting, comes final exhaustion of funds, and then cleverly concealed destitution. So widespread and permanent is this condition of desperate poverty that credit almost has vanished from Hollywood business life except where Bradstreet will answer for the applicant. Shops carry the significant sign "No checks"; and one feels everywhere the precautions of a community endeavoring to protect itself against the broken morale of the desperate.

In all this matter of opportunity one thing is very certain: qualifications have little or nothing to do with gaining or keeping a job. Nowhere is ignorance so handsomely rewarded and cherished.

I have a friend who is a successful title-writer and the perfect Babbitt. Personally I do not object to Babbitts; but I am amazed that my friend cannot write one sentence of grammatical English, has not even a flirtatious acquaintance with punctuation, and makes the most amusing "breaks" on the screen, as when, for instance, in one title he wrote the word "broadcasted." Yet this writer of banal,

ungrammatical, ill-punctuated titles is much in demand and earns an excellent living.

Many of the minor directors are amusingly and amazingly ignorant. One such was handling a scene requiring an artist's studio interior. When the Italian craftsman who was "dressing the set" introduced two effective bits of antique statuary, "The Winged Victory" and "The Venus De Milo," the director flew into a violent rage. "What the hell yer givin' us damned old stuff like that for," he roared, "the head gone off one, and the arms knocked off the other. I thought I told you to make me a real swell set!"

There are scenario writers who have never passed the third grade at school, directors who have never had an hour's education nor training which would fit them for the work they are doing, who have never traveled, nor have read much beyond the *Police Gazette*. The waste and inefficiency in the industry, the rank incompetence in high places, have caused many a shake-up and are likely to lead soon to something in the nature of an earthquake; for Wall Street is beginning to demand a control over the business departments of an industry to which it supplies tens of millions of dollars a year.

On the other hand you will find, especially among the more prominent directors and among the obscure folk who form the personal armies of such an amazing sum of cleverness, ingenuity, expertness and capacity to do the impossible. For the making of every picture, like the getting out of a great daily, is a sort of

perilous and perpetual adventure in speed, knack and precision; and every film hides more human drama than the best screen stories tell.

Finally, no account of Hollywood and its life would be genuine which did not remark on the two things which never vary and are practically perfect: the climate and the kindliness of the people. The one is fallen from heaven, and perhaps the other also. Or perhaps it is the fellowship of so much silent, concealed suffering, so much pluckily hid tragedy and destitution. Whatever its source the kindness itself is ubiquitous and charming and real, a mixture of the bonhomie of the stage, the neighborliness of a small town and the camaraderie of the arts; a festive, happy, inquisitive spirit, like that of Paris, but more genuine.

HOLLYWOOD ON THE OHIO

TUPPER GREENWALD

Old Chris, the janitor at Central Turner Hall, seemed glad that we had come. He was lonely. Some years back the war had shunted a cloud of suspicion over the building. Against an imminent downpour of tar and feathers the Turners had raised a canopy of American flags. "Yankee Doodle" and "If I Had a Son for Each Star in Old Glory I'd Give Them All to You, Uncle Sam," darted into the repertoire of the *maennerchor* known as *Die Lustige Bruder*. The old harmony gave way to shrillness and fever. Tongues wore heavy coatings of Thrift Stamp glue. Official boots had also to be licked. It became impossible to sing. *Die Lus-*

tige Bruder staggered pellmell into the good, gray ranks of the Home Guard, where *Sieben-thalers* were written down on the roster as *Sevendollarses*, *Dreifooses* as *Threefoots*, and *Schoenbergs* as *Belmonts*.

In 1925, when we arrived, the Hall still had a beleaguered look. Old Chris fawned. He was still conciliating the Department of Justice... Despite his hernia he would help us hoist that camera carriage to the third floor. He grabbed a wheel. Nothing could dislodge him. His red face burst into perspiration. His bandy legs quivered on the cracked marble stairs where each step was worn to a deep dip in the middle by the countless feet that in mellower days had climbed to the third floor and there moved in the more or less chaste discipline of the *ma-zurka*. A happy glint flitted in Chris' bulging blue eyes. We were friendly Americans. He could see that we meant no harm—*ja*, or rather "yess." There must have been something reassuring in our president's name.

We were the Sam Lasser Motion Picture Productions Studios, Incorporated.

Sam Lasser had the head of a lion and an infinitesimal neck vertically. Fully six inches of lumpy forehead dropped backward abruptly to a mop of hair twelve inches long. This tumbled about unbelievable ears. The whole face was unbelievable. The best way I can describe it is to say that it resembled a badly managed composite photograph of several satyrs and John L. Sullivan. There was a touch of David Wark Griffith in the nose. (Sam pointed it out to me one day.) His skin was yellow deep-

ening to brown in the bags under his eyeballs, and if he had any teeth that were not speckled with gold, I never saw them. I shall spare you a description of his hands.

When Sam hired me he told me that he was French-Catholic on his mother's side and Jewish on his great-grandfather's. This helped me somewhat in accounting for the size of the salary he offered me.

"Don't stand in your own light, boy," Sam said. "You've got the nucleus of a genu-wine creator in you. Grow with me. Don't put this chance of yours in je-opardy over a few smackers. After all, what the hell's money?"

I tried to haggle. Sam parried with slabs of his personal history. He talked in whopping polysyllables, but they seemed small rolling out of that mouth. He had been "behind the gun" (the camera) for Lubin in the days when the Industry was so young that it could not have been described as being even in its infancy. Opening his shirt he showed me the place where two ribs had cracked under the strain of acting in "The Spoilers." He had aided "Griff" in the filming of "The Birth." He had had dealings with Laemmle and Zukor when they didn't have a . . . During the war he had dragged his camera into the front-line trenches. When a bullet plowed up his left shoulder, flattening on the clavicle, he returned home, and still bandaged, "shot" a concrete ship in various stages of construction. He described a bacchanalian cruise in that ship. A Major-General Hines and Sam were like that. . . . The Peace found him back on the Coast, resolved

to forsake the crank and "get the megaphone." There were difficulties. Sam didn't say whether he overcame them. At any rate, in 1921, he happened to be "on location" in a Mississippi village. Here, in a modiste's shoppe, he met the runner-up in a state-wide beauty contest. She suited him, he said, and he married her. . . . Now he was pursuing an ideal: the production of a great big super-classic starring Mrs. Lasser, professionally known as Elma Wilberforce. He intended to begin modestly with a series of kid comedies starring Mrs. Lasser. . . .

I agreed to go to work for thirty-five dollars a week "on a part-time arrangement." Sam would teach me the fine art of writing subtitles.

"You've got a comprehensical perspective," he opined. "Give me your undivided cooperation and I'll build you up. There's no art in the world that places such a high premium on talent. I'll work with you. I like to work with a virgin mind."

Believe it or not, Sam had charm. He beguiled me so much that I didn't ask him how he had happened to choose this middlewestern soap center for his operations, nor why he had left Hollywood. I felt that he could never leave Hollywood. He carried it around with him. A little later I saw him sell it.

No studio work was done the first month. We, the crew, pitched pennies, while Sam went about town grappling for good will. He invaded the newspaper offices, appalling twenty-five dollar-a-week movie critics with his face. But as soon as they perceived that his mission

was not murder—it took a little time—they gave him publicity. They saw that he was a mountebank but felt a cynical delight in liking him. The diabetic matrons composing the local Better Motion Pictures Council took Sam much more seriously. He was Hollywood. They would improve him. He was Field Work of the most intimate kind. Besides, he could smile and he had a manner. He impressed the shuddering dames as a most civil and mysterious Caliban.

It was at the Business Men's Club, however, that Sam got in one of his best strokes. They let him eat and talk and he met George Flantz, a promoter. Capital got slightly interested, and one Saturday there were pay-checks for the crew.

"I always take care of my men," Sam said. We of the crew were happy. We could go on pitching pennies.

"Don't you worry, boys," George Flantz said. "The eagle'll be screaming regularly." George had built up a carefully concealed fortune on the strength of his gorgeous hair, his firm handshake, his golf score, and the daily carnation in his lapel. He respected Sam's Art, and even believed a little in Sam's vision of a Hollywood on the Ohio.

"I'll take care of my end," George promised. "I'll bring 'em around." And he began to pore over the membership roll of the *Turn Verein*. "We're paying 'em rent, ain't we?"

A week later George bagged three stockholders: Max Heile, who owned a sausage factory near the Hall; Henry Wittekind, a prosperous

house-painter; and Mrs. Ludwig Kamphaus, the bediamonded relict of a saloonkeeper.

Meanwhile Sam had recruited a troupe of actors. There were golden-haired little girls from the elocution schools with perfumed mothers or mothers who blinked shyly through spectacles. There were little boys wearing Buster Brown collars. One of these weighed a hundred and forty pounds; Sam called him "Arbuckle" privately. We also had about a dozen urchins picked up in the neighborhood—Nor-dics, Italians, Afro-Americans—and I don't know how many babes in arms. It looked as if Sam were conducting an experiment in democracy. But not for long. A number of mammas and papas, eager to insure the artistic welfare of their children, asked Sam if they might buy shares in the company. Sam said he thought it could be arranged, though of course it was against the policy of the corporation to place stock (which meant voting power) in the hands of temperamental actors or their sponsors. . . .

Sam knew how to round up talent. From the Municipal Zoo he borrowed a family of skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*). He also located Jeff Hart, an animal trainer who carried a Bull Durham sack filled with Mexican diamonds in a vest pocket. Jeff brought us an intelligent terrier named Tex, three dancing, gasping poodles, and two monkeys, Brother Joe and Sister Josephine, who were solemn and incestuous.

I must not forget the adult actors. Our comedian was Tom Jeans, a small, charming, toothless man who would not buy plates because he

had learned to love the feel of hash on naked gums. No, sir, there was nothing like "fricassee of rubber boot." . . . For the heavy roles we had Joe Tighe, an ancient prizefighter with dyed hair, who had stayed eight rounds with Mysterious Billy Smith in 1902 or thereabouts. Our ingenue, soubrette, tragedienne, and all-round leading lady was Mrs. Lasser. She possessed a talent for cutting star shapes out of tin foil and a horror of becoming known as a type. "They sap one's vitality" she said of people whom she did not fancy, and these seemed to include all the inhabitants of North America with the possible exception of Sam, who called her "Miss Wilberforce" under orders and "Sugar" over the telephone.

Within three months twenty-four thousand dollars passed into the exchequer. Sam bought a Buick Sedan and the old dance floor became so choked with second-hand studio equipment that we began to think we might have to give up pitching pennies some day.

The day came.

"On set," cried Sam. "On set, Miss Wilberforce."

Dressed in a riding habit Miss Wilberforce glided into the space formed by two walls of a cabin.

"Light 'em up!"

A switch handle crashed. Above La Lasser's head a row of long glass tubes attached to a frame clucked and became suffused with a pale blue light. At her sides other tubes came to life.

"Now give me the Big Berthas," Sam bel-

lowed through his huge green megaphone. It had a bright nickel handle. "The Big Berthas!"

Three great arc-lamps with reflectors twice the size of manhole covers blinked furiously and flung shafts of hard white light across the drizzle of blue. Then six Kleig lamps on short legs threw more white light at La Lasser.

Behind Sam's high chair an audience of fifty stood pop-eyed. Members of the *Turn Verein* crowded each other, faces shining and paunches taut. Mothers hoisted children above wriggling shoulders. A few babies bawled at the spitting and hissing of the lights. Others could be heard glub-glubbing, while many feet overhead, Brother Joe and Sister Josephine made dalliance on a chandelier. . . .

"Camera! Action!"

Miss Wilberforce moved thoughtfully towards a table. She had taken four steps when Sam cried:

"Cut!"

Miss Wilberforce stopped, relaxed.

"Now a close-up."

The crew pushed the Big Berthas five feet nearer the table. The Kleig lamps were placed in a blazing cluster about La Lasser's head. Her complexion began to melt.

"Now," said Sam, "Miss Wilberforce, your business is to smell that skunk."

A tentative pucker appeared on her nose.

"All right?"

"O. K., Sug—Miss Wilberforce," he approved.

"Camera! Action!"

The nose wrinkled once, twice—

"Cut!"

Sam tugged at his mane, deliberating.

"You rest now, Miss Wilberforce. Get me that skunk, somebody."

"Which one?" asked Tom Jeans, who was also property man.

"The little fellow."

We spent the remainder of the day—three hours—trying to get a good close-up view of the little fellow. The audience stayed to the end. But the little fellow was bored, having no interest whatsoever in the cinema.

It may be well to pause here and speculate a little on the psychology of the people whom Lasser duped. But wait—did he dupe them? I doubt it. I think that a majority of the plunging Turners came to Sam duped in advance. The movies had long ago cast a spell over them, and when they came to Sam they came wanting to play—play respectably, that is. It was obvious. Under their hard, glum questions about dividends they concealed an itch for a romp among glamors. They craved the big talk, the lights, the color, the excitement—dividends which they were too respectable to discuss. In the studio they could seize at one leap the raptures of the picnic and the marketplace. Where else in town could they do this? What other corporation had a Soul? In other words, Sam's victims invested in Escape under the guise of Big Business—or—where there were talented offspring—in Escape under the guise of Parental Sacrifice. Legally, of course, there was fraud. But essentially Sam gave nearly everybody his money's worth.

At the end of twelve months, when he had

produced four two-reel comedies or "featurettes," as he liked to call them, Sam announced a party and premiere screening in the studio. Three thousand invitation cards were printed. The newspapers obligingly whooped things up, and Elma Wilberforce got out her scrapbook, shears, and paste. The blurbs carried photographs and were so ingeniously edited by Sam that almost every stockholder found some reason to cut himself a clipping or two.

The party fairly throbbed with glory. Sam had to make a speech:

"I don't know how to begin to tell you all how much . . . the creative efforts of these little miniature stars . . . the technique of the photoplay . . . a real nucleus . . . the inspiration of my wife, Miss Elma Wilberforce . . . amalgamating this wonderful city with the paramount art and industry of the world and creating a Hollywood in our midst . . . We professionals . . . the indomitable vision of local business men . . . I thank you."

Next morning eight cans were thrust into a satchel, and Sam told a specially hired salesman, one Wilcox, a genial fellow:

"Now you make 'em listen to you. You've got a real product. Talk to 'em like a Dutch uncle."

Wilcox said that he would. He gave Sam a cigar and took the cans to Milwaukee, where a film producers' and exhibitors' convention was in progress. Privately Wilcox had whispered to me that there was little or no demand for electric fans in the Arctic Circle. He was a trifle surprised that the contents of the cans, eight

strips of film each one thousand feet long, had cost sixty-five thousand dollars to produce.

Sam said we must sit back and wait for news from Wilcox. Every day for a week telegrams arrived. Sam reported that Wilcox was making progress. "Those birds, even when they're sold on a product down to the ground, they—Why, I remember Laemmle. . . ."

After a fortnight Sam announced that he had sent Wilcox on to New York.

"It's a long grind," he explained. "We'll hear from the guys Wilcox interviewed in Milwaukee. They'll come down a few pegs. They'll come to *us*. But there's no use waiting. The objective is to screen our productions for some big distributor—say, Educational—right in their own plant."

Meanwhile echoes of the premiere had attracted more prospects. George Flantz experienced no difficulty in selling them stock, and twenty-five thousand dollars went into the almost empty steel box inside the big black safe.

Sam presented Miss Wilberforce with a brooch that flamed like a white bonfire, and said:

"I think I'd better go to New York personally."

He went, Miss Wilberforce accompanied him personally, and we of the crew resumed our penny-pitching, played rumme, exchanged all our old stories, or invented new ones. Tom Jeans spent hours trying to interest Brother Joe and Sister Josephine in peanuts.

Stockholders dropped in on us daily. Informed that Mr. Lasser was still in New York, they murmured:

"Ah . . . ah-hah. . . ."

They understood. To laymen Sam's business in the metropolis might be a mystery. But they were in the know. They liked the idea of Sam's being in New York. Vicariously they were hobnobbing with movie kings. . . . They walked about among the lamps and sets, explaining everything to friends they had brought along. "This is a Kleig." Several electrocutions were narrowly averted.

As the days passed a surmise flitted into the studio. Perhaps Sam would not return.

"It's an old racket," Joe Tighe the prize-fighter said. "Suckers have to hold the bag. I'm stickin', though, so long's the eagle screams."

But Sam came back. His business had taken up seven weeks. He was furious in a bran-new coonskin coat. He could not understand what had got into the Industry. His faith was toppling.

"We produce nice clean stuff and they want legs, rough-house, slap-'em-down. It's beyond my comprehension. I showed 'em that skunk sequence. I might as well've showed it to a couple icebergs. Our stuff's too good, boys."

Wilcox also had never seen the beat of it. Sam had left him in New York eating his heart out.

"It's one of the worst situations I ever had to face. . . ."

He stretched out on a divan in a corner of

the studio and lay tugging at his hair morosely all that day. No one dared disturb him. He seemed to be suffering.

The next day he appeared a little more affable. By the end of the week he was glowing with the mild, kindly aura of a resigned idealist. He announced that he would see visitors now.

To stockholders he said, genially:

"What's the use of discussing it? For instance, they said that our kiddies didn't have enough mobility of the features. You see, their objective isn't talent. They want crude stuff. Why should we bother with 'em?"

The stockholders understood. Perfectly. Like Sam they were thwarted artists, all of them. It was in the nature of movie kings to sniff at newcomers. Only two or three Turners asked Sam how much money he had spent in New York.

Sam sighed.

"You've hit it. That's what hurts—the money I had to spend in my concentrated efforts to bring those people to an understanding."

Sam was told not to worry. The money didn't matter. They didn't care about that. And perhaps they didn't. They seemed to find a real joy in sympathizing with Sam. And after all, from a business point of view, what was ninety thousand dollars in the Industry?

"A drop in the bucket," Sam repeated after them.

He called a meeting. He impressed the stockholders with the fact that it was hardly worth while to continue fishing up pearls for swine.

"Some day our productions will obtain the appreciation and sales they merit." In the meantime he was taking a year's leave of absence. "I have to get away and rest from the strain."

Sam won an informal vote of confidence by a majority of six to one. There was no need of a formal vote, for Sam controlled fifty-one per cent of the stock. A few obstinate minority voters decided to consult their attorneys.

Sam's leave of absence has run its course. I imagine he will prolong it, for recently I read in a theatrical paper that a Negro colony in Georgia has been "organized and incorporated for the purpose of producing all-colored motion pictures. Pastor Homer S. Oxenham, colored, and Sam Lasser, white, are heads. Lasser is a professional." Evidently the Old-time Religion is not enough.

CECIL DEMILLE—MOVIE EVANGELIST

LOUIS ADAMIC

Toward the close of last spring a great event transpired in Hollywood—Sid Grauman opened his new two—or is it three?—million-dollar Chinese Theater. Sid, according to his press agents, is "the world's greatest showman," and it may be that they are pretty nearly correct. Jointly with a few movie magnates, including DeMille, he owns, or has owned, about half a dozen large and successful first-run movie palaces in Los Angeles and Hollywood; and the new Chinese Theater promises to overshadow the rest.

According to the official description composed by his head publicity man, Sid's new movie temple reflects "the most glorious period in architectural fantasy, the early Chinese dynasties, authentic in every structural detail, with all the mystery of the Orient suggested in its towering minarets of burnished copper that frown in silent grandeur. The solid facade of masonry forty feet high, surmounted by four ornate obelisks, presents the effect of a huge gate or entrance to a great Oriental garden, and two colossal fountain bowls fashioned to represent stone flowers, catch spray from bronze gargoyles high above, where full-grown palms and rare tropical trees shake their tops. . . ." To those who like fantastic, richly and variously colored, and all around elaborate places, the theater no doubt is impressively, vividly beautiful; while to those who incline toward simplicity and harmony in things, the house, erected in the midst of a lot of American office buildings and hotels is, to put it mildly, a queer bit of incongruity.

And the first picture to be shown in this heathenish setting is Cecil B. DeMille's and Jeanie MacPherson's version of the last three years of the life of the so-called Christian Savior entitled *The King of Kings*! It is almost as if the Pope of Rome would take a notion to celebrate the Holy Mass in a Turkish mosque or a Buddhist temple. But on second thought: why not? Christianity took much from Paganism.

The Western premiere of *The King of Kings* at Sid's new Chinese Theater! . . . It's a great

day in Los Angeles, indeed in entire Southern California; and before I say anything of the play itself I shall sketch briefly the excitement that the opening of one of Sid's new movie palaces creates in Los Angeles. It will be of interest, I think, to the student of public psychology and high-powered advertising.

Now Sid is of the same shy and retiring disposition as the great Morris Gest, chief barker for that lovely piece of hokum, *The Miracle*. For weeks before the great event the newspapers and billboards are full of Sid and DeMille and Jesus Christ.

Sid's first-nights are social events in Southern California. Admission, as a rule, is five dollars, but for *The King of Kings* first-night Sid charges eleven dollars and sells out a week before the date. It is an occasion when oil and real estate millionaires, evangelists and the celluloid aristocracy come out in mass with all their glitter.

It's a great night in Hollywood. The show is scheduled to begin at 8:30, but by 7 o'clock the traffic is tied up in a knot for ten blocks in all directions from the theater, although the ticket-holders are still at their dinners. Here come the common folks, office and shop workers, and the immigrants from Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska, who either could not get a ticket or cannot afford to spend eleven dollars for a movie show, but who are eager to see Doug and Mary, and Connie and Norma, and Gloria Swanson and her new blue-blood husband, and the rest of the equally famous movie people whom Sid has announced through the

newspapers to have purchased opening-night tickets. Police reserves and boy-scouts are out to handle the crowds. They stretch ropes to keep the mob from rushing the limousine of some movie darling.

Overhead thousands of Chinese lanterns dangle from wires stretched from building to building for several blocks. Powerful search-lights dance silently in the nearby hills and in the sky. Scores of Kleigs glare. . . . It is 8 o'clock and past the entrance to the theater court there begins to roll a stream of shiny Pierce-Arrows, Cunninghams, and various foreign cars with blinding headlights. The celebrities! The princess and princesses of our "democratic" America! The darlings of Fortune! . . . And the crowd, their faces sick-white in the light of glaring Kleigs, jammed against tight ropes, with a policeman or boy scout every ten feet, stare and gape, now and then letting out an eager cheer as they recognize some well-known star. "Oh, there's Clara Bow! We seen 'er last night in *Rough-House Rosie*. Sure was good." But Miss Bow is as yet one of the lesser planets in the Hollywood constellation. . . . "Oh, there's So-and-So." The famous Miss So-and-So, it seems, is made happy by the applause from the sidewalk; she leans slightly out of the window of her French car, driven by a chauffeur disguised as a Cossack, smiles one of her sweetest screen smiles and waves her tiny lace handkerchief imported from Czechoslovakia. The crowd is happy; the famous Miss So-and-So has smiled and waved her lace handkerchief to them; and to-

morrow scores of letters shall go to Iowa and Ohio and Arkansas informing the cousins back there that Miss So-and-So is just too sweet for anything.

Miss So-and-So's French car draws up in front of the theater court. One of the attendants, a youthful Chinaman dressed in a mandarin coat and hat, opens the door of her limousine and presently Miss So-and-So steps out, exposing herself to the glaring Kleigs and grinding cameras.

"Now entering the court is Miss So-and-So with her husband, the Marquis ———," which is radio-broadcast as well as amplified for the crowds five and ten blocks away. (Applause from the sidewalks up and down Hollywood Boulevard.) And while Miss So-and-So and her Marquis cross the court, the crowds and Radioland are informed that the lady is wearing such-and-such a gown and such-and-such jewels, all of which is noted by society reporters and next morning printed in the newspapers. Every celebrity, from Czar Will Hays and Cecil DeMille all the way down to the least of last year's crop of baby stars, and each name sends a thrill through the crowds on the sidewalks.

Once the celebrities are safely inside and the show begins, the crowds are permitted to enter the court. They gape at the "celestial magnificence" of the exterior, but before long they spot the blocks of concrete in the middle of the court where Gloria Swanson, Connie and Norma Talmadge and Mary and Doug have their signatures and foot- and hand-prints graven under

such testimonials as "Love—Always to Sid!" or "Sid dear: My wish is for your success" or "Good luck, Sid"—which, of course, is far more interesting and important to the average movie fan than all Chinese architecture put together. The folks are thrilled by the smallness of Gloria's step and they laugh at the large foot of Douglas Fairbanks. They try to fit their own feet into the impressions and laugh and giggle. Who cares about the architectural authenticity of the new theater or its towering minarets of burnished copper which, it is claimed, frown in silent grandeur, when here are the foot- and hand-prints of living objects of admiration. Oh, Sid is a most clever young man: if the folks are unable to discuss the five Chinese periods of architectural art represented in his new movie temple, he will have them talk and write back home about Gloria's and Connie's and Norma's and Doug's and Mary's feet and hands!

The interior is dazzling, barbaric. Ushers in Chinese costumes, with fantastic headgear, take one to the seat. Huge columns, suggestions of temples and imperial palaces, a confusion of gold and light. Dazzling. . . .

* * *

The motion picture is preceded by a prologue: scenes from the Scriptures—"dance of the palms," chant of Israelite high priests, Daniel in the Lion's Den, the Star of Bethlehem, the Nativity, the Flight from Egypt, and so on, each scene a living reproduction of some famous painting.

Then, at last, *The King of Kings*, the movie

gospel according to Cecil B. DeMille, the director, and Jeanie Macpherson, the scenarist. One of the first subtitles informs the audience that the picture was produced in compliance with the oft-expressed wish of Jesus Christ that his Message be carried all over the world. Cecil DeMille—evangelist!

DeMille is a shrewd director, but he is an even greater businessman, and he knows that evangelism pays high in these Christian States. His first sermon-movie, *The Ten Commandments*, yielded him a huge financial success, but *The King of Kings*, judging from the start that it has, will be at least twice as successful. For every pulpiteer in the country turns into a barker for the show as soon as it hits town. For four Sundays after the play opened at Hollywood the preachers in Southern California preached about it from their pulpits; and even now, two months after the opening, with no additional advertising on the part of Sid, one has difficulty securing a good seat unless reserved days ahead.

Personally, I went to see the picture with a prejudiced mind. Most of the evils of the past and the present, and most of the unhappiness on earth I trace to religions centered in some personality such as Jesus; and of all religions the Christian hokum seems to me the most awful in its effects upon its followers and upon mankind in general. If I could I would not hesitate a moment to wipe Christianity out of existence; and so when along comes a man like Cecil B. DeMille, a great film director, who commands a powerful means of education and,

instead of using it for that purpose, perverts it, for the sake of making a few million dollars, into a medium of religious propaganda ten times as effective as all pulpit sermons in the country, it is natural for me to resent the fact. He gives the world, already saturated in bunk, a pictorially and technically almost perfect episodic depiction of the last three years of Christ's life as it is written in the four Gospels, which have repeatedly been shown up by reputed and disinterested scholars as largely if not wholly fictitious without hinting with so much as a word that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, his biographers, were in what anthropologists call the mythological stage of intellectual development, and that, therefore, the story may be little more than a legend pure and simple, not unlike the story of Buddha and scores of other saviors, Christian and pagan.

On the whole De Mille's Jesus, as vague as he is, is a distinct improvement upon the crazy personality of the four Gospels; and on that account, perhaps, the more effective. De Mille eliminates most of the "miracles" mentioned in the New Testament; there is, for instance, no feeding of the multitude with a few fishes and a few loaves of bread, nor walking upon the surface of water, nor turning water into wine (though I suppose that this was omitted for fear of offending the prohibitionists). There is considerable healing of the sick and afflicted, and in one instance Jesus sends Peter fishing and the latter hooks a fish with a large Roman coin in its mouth, sufficient to pay taxes to Caesar. DeMille's

Jesus pulls a good many charlatanic tricks; but, on the other hand, the Sermon on the Mount is almost completely forgotten, and so are the parables. It seems that Director De Mille and his scenarist strove to appeal to the simplest of minds; there is nothing in his Christ to appeal to the really intelligent, thinking man or to the man of imagination.

DeMille's Christ is a god created in the image of the average present-day Christian believer—unheroic, anemic. If the average moviegoer could think, or had some information on the basis of which he could do some straight thinking, I would have no quarrel with *The King of Kings*. For unwittingly De Mille has created a Christ devoid of dynamic reality. It would be interesting to get the view of the picture of some intelligent heathen who has never read the New Testament or Papini's *Life* or gone to Sunday school. I wager that he would be greatly puzzled by De Mille's Jesus. The "miracles" that he performs on the screen just happen, that is all. The people just follow him, and one is unable to perceive why. He "cures" people, but unlike Aimee Semple McPherson, who while at the business displays a certain dynamic force, he just "cures" them, that is all. He chases the money-changers out of the temple, but as they run before him one wonders why they are running. He is unreal. That may not be the fault of H. B. Warner, the actor who plays the part, but DeMille's, who strove to make a Christ that would offend no Christian and as a result succeeded in making a good portrait

of a myth. But, of course, the average movie-goer is a yokel, his cranium already crammed with the four Gospels, and this film, which his pastor will urge him to see, will serve to give movement to his ideas previously vitalized by dynamic pulpit-thumpers.

The picture is effective, even beautiful in spots; there is a good deal of excellent acting. Ernest Torrence as *Peter* and the man who plays *Pontius Pilate* are excellent; *Judas* is very good, and so is Jacqueline Logan as *Mary Magdelene* in the first few scenes.

Cecil DeMille recently expressed his pride in the alleged fact that the luxurious bath-room scenes in his films in the past have served to accelerate the evolution of American bath-room plumbing. American bath-room plumbing is not perfect yet; I wish he would resume producing films with elegant bath tubs and, so long as he fears to offend the preachers, leave the Bible alone.

"SIN" AND CHARLIE CHAPLIN

DAVID WARREN RYDER

Intrepid explorers who have penetrated the jungles of the land of Aimee Semple McPherson and survived to return to civilization, bring back interesting stories of a community lying adjacent to McPhersonville, which is adorned by the nice-sounding name of Pasadena. The people of this self-satisfied community, we learn, are, so far as outward appearances go,

not at all unlike those to be found in McPhersonville. They may drive more motors than flivvers, and they may "dawnce" instead of dance; but they do go to movies, listen to the radio and the professional uplifters, and in general live about the same lives that their near neighbors do. The thing that distinguishes them, however, is that however much they may sanction sin *in private*—and one reads frequently of Pasadenans who have called on the courts to sunder marital ties—they will not give it public recognition. They may sin amongst themselves; they may not register any lively attack upon sin; and they may find considerable joy in reading of and discussing sin. But let a sin, or accounts of it stride out into the open amongst them, and they immediately draw the curtains, lock the doors and telephone for a posse to come and arrest sin and drag it out of the precincts of their holy community.

In view of this delightful system of differentiation, it is not at all surprising that the rulers of Pasadena, with the apparent wholehearted sanction of its professionally pious population, have barred motion pictures featuring Charles Chaplin, whose wife is now occupied in the business of making charges reflecting upon her distinguished husband's attitude toward the sacrament of marriage. This, notwithstanding the fact that my agents, authorized and unauthorized, report to me that the good people of Pasadena have not canceled their subscriptions to the nearby newspapers which almost daily print whole columns of the

latest "dirt" in the case, and that something like 25,000 copies of the lovely Lita's divorce complaint, quite unexpurgated, have been sold to them. But however this may be, the good people of the community solemnly swear that for the sake of the morals of the community they simply cannot allow the exhibition of a Chaplin film. And it may be subject for a real psychiatric investigation that in the same breath with which they announce this high moral resolve, they propound to whoever may be near enough to hear, the query: "Did you read the latest about the Chaplin case this morning?" and rush off straight-a-way to get the last issue of the afternoon paper.

In this enlightened age it is not unusual, of course, to see a community make an ass of itself; indeed the reverse is what is more likely than not to be unusual, but it does seem that Pasadena has carried the thing to the extreme. On the face of things it is of course absurd for a community which has consumed some 25,000 copies of the salacious charges made by Mrs. Chaplin, to talk loudly of morality and immorality; but the absurdest thing of all is to contend that merely because a woman has made unsupported charges against a man, a motion picture film made by him or in which he appears cannot be shown without undermining public morals. And especially so when it is the case, as with Chaplin, that all films in which he has appeared are scrupulously clean of anything that even a holy Pasadenan might brand immoral. There is no charge by those who have led the movement to bar his films

that the films, as such, are anything but satisfactory so far as morality is concerned. The action of the self-constituted censors rests entirely on the charges, made by a woman who obviously is completely biased, that Chaplin's attitude toward marriage was not what it should be.

Again, it might be different if Chaplin had transgressed or was accused of transgressing some law of the land, and was on trial therefore in some court. But there is no warrant against him; he is accused of no crime; there is not even the suggestion of criminality in any particular. All that has been said against him has been said by one person; and she one who apparently would never have been removed from a deserved obscurity except for his marriage to her. Notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding the fact that according to all intelligent critics of the film, Chaplin has the distinction of being the one great artist in film-dom, the one person who has done perhaps more than all others combined to raise the motion picture from the levels of obscenity to esthetic heights, the people of Pasadena now brand his work with the scarlet letter. "Sin," in effect say these professionally pious and moral people, "is all right to read about, to talk about, to discuss extensively. It is all right, too, so long as it is kept dark and private. But once it emerges into the light and becomes a public thing, then we must apply the coat of tar and feathers and ride it on a rail out of town." That, in effect, is the absurd and immoral statement that the city of Pasadena

makes when it officially bars the showing of Chaplin films within its confines. One wonders if absurdity and *real* immorality can be carried to a farther extreme.

THE STORY OF THE MOVIES

WHY THE MOTION PICTURE TODAY LAGS FAR BEHIND ITS MEANS

ISAAC GOLDBERG

I

I well remember the coming of the "movies" to my native Boston: the "movies," that is, as a solo amusement on the screen, not as an element in a nickel arcade or as a "supperchaser" in the vaudeville shows. As kids, we had been gradually led up to the emergence of the film in all its wonders of today. As kids, in fact, we were part of the evolution of the cinema. The Edison kinetoscope must have waned a while before my time; when I had arrived at the age of the dime novel this pioneer peep-show had been replaced by the mutoscope, which was to be found in phonograph and novelty parlors in the gayer parts of the town. You dropped a nickel—later it was a cent—into a slot and then grabbed fiercely hold of a crank, which you turned breathlessly as your eyes stared through a magnifying glass and saw real people move. It was over all too soon. The wheel of photographs that was flipped past your bulging eyes by the rotary excitement of your arm ran its course in about a minute. But such a minute!

It must have been all but thirty years ago, and it came back to me vividly only the other evening when, during a ramble, I came across one of these selfsame mutoscopes in an ice-cream parlor, where it had come to die. The remnant of those once gaudy machines has probably been farmed out to end its days in an inglorious corner. I am not too bashful, yet I confess I had to conquer a certain shyness before I dropped my cent in the slot and returned to my childhood days. It was an antiquated slap-stick comedy, a minute or less long, in which a tramp-intruder is clubbed out of a house. I thought of other such scenes that had cast a glamor over my not too happy youth. Fire engines answering an alarm. . . . A round from a prize fight. . . . A butterfly dance, so called from the resemblance of the lady's billowing skirts to the wings of a butterfly. . . . A lady undressing, with the picture ending at the crucial moment. . . . Some of these were sold also as a little book of cards that could be flipped by the thumb, creating a similar illusion of motion.

We had known the moving-pictures early, and had learned early to despise them. I am not referring now to any lofty conception of what the amiable and enthusiastic Elie Faure has christened Cineplastics. We had stopped at street-corners and seen projected, onto a screen that adorned some roof in a business section, visions of engines answering alarms, of trains pulling into stations, of succulent kisses that lasted so long you could almost taste them at a distance of three hundred feet.

We had to pay for these fleeting glimpses with the patience of reading the stereopticon advertisements that came between one moving-picture and another. It was tiresome business and soon lost its fascination. Some of us who managed to scrape together the admission fee to Keith's vaudeville house had seen "movies" there, at the end of the show, and we knew that it was the signal for the audience to leave. I remember that the long-deceased department store of Pitts, Kimball and Lewis gave special entertainments with moving pictures purporting to depict scenes from the Spanish-American war. There were realistic effects behind the scenes—the dashing of waves, the tattoo of the drum, the rattle of bullets.

We were prepared, then, for the coming of the "movies" as solo entertainment. How ill prepared we were for their staying, however, is another tale, which I am fond of telling as an illustration of my business acumen. (And yet, not to be too severe toward my shortcomings, I must remind you that Edison, without whom the moving picture would not have been, lost millions through his short-sightedness in gauging their future. He had no faith in screen projection; he allowed foreign patent-rights to slip through his fingers; he was so busy with his electrical problems that he overlooked commercial trend and possibility.) To return to my tale. For weeks a building—a modest affair—had been going up on Scollay Square, Boston; in the utmost secrecy. Passing it daily, returning from our newspaper routes, we would eye the place curiously, but nothing would cajole

a word of information from the workmen. Scollay Square then, as now, was sacred to the land-sports of the U. S. navy; it was the location of the early phonograph and mutoscope parlors, where a nickel bought you a slapstick farce or a march of John Philip Sousa's, shrilled to your private ears through two tubes, that branched out at your thorax and went their separate ways to your auditory nerves. Judge of the excitement among the populace, then, when the new place opened shortly under the imposingly exotic name, "Opera Comique." I am in the long line that passed before the box-office window that night. I paid my dime and walked straight into a punctured illusion.

All I saw was rows of seats for all the world like the smelly hall of the nickeldom on nearby Hanover Street, leading to a very shallow stage backed by a white screen. A man came out and sang an illustrated song. There was music, and then—*piece de resistance*—a moving-picture story was unrolled. It may have been Mary Pickford in one of her early school-teacher parts. I did not wait for the end. I had been cheated out of a dime. Angrily, and therefore in the proper mood for prophecy, I remarked to the friend who had been cheated with me, "I give this place a couple of weeks. Of all the frosts! They take the supper-chaser from the vaudeville house and make a show of it by itself, and expect people to pay them for it!"

That prophecy was very much without honor in its own city. Today, Scollay Square is the

army and navy's Arabian Nights—tales, houris and all. To the right and left of the recruiting station rise movie-houses small and great, one of them palatial in its appointments and all of them thronged daily and nightly with unappeasable multitudes, and Scollay Square, at that, is by no means the movie center of the city. The Metropolitan, newly built, holds 6,000; the new Keith-Albee holds 5,000; on every hand the higher type of entertainment yields to the lure of the film. I had given the industry a couple of weeks; it is here forever and a day. And now it has its Homer—its extolling bard and chronicler—in the shape of Mr. Terry Ramsaye, who has just issued his *Million and One Nights Entertainment: A History of the Motion Pictures*.

When, some fifteen years after my childhood experiences, the motion picture, together with me, acquired man's estate. I was again among the prophets. This time, too, without honor, but not without fulfilment. There was much talk about the educational possibilities of the film, ten or more years ago. There still is. There always will be. Being at that time a Socialist editor, I naturally launched into an article explaining that investment looked for profits, that beguiling the mob paid more than improving its mind; ergo, the "movies" would go the way of all flesh. It must have been a revolutionary idea in those days, for I was advised not to print the article and, as a last concession to my obstinacy, at least to use a pseudonym. I ran it under my own name and the heavens didn't fall. Nor did the moving-

picture. It proved a phenomenal investment; it beguiled the mob. And it has educated the people—chiefly downward. However, I am not irretrievably pessimistic, and balm has come out of Gilead. The human average is . . . average, and human. How could it be anything else? The “movies,” like the geni in the fisherman’s bottle, have risen and covered the heavens; they cannot be bottled back. From this procession of inventions, industries and investments there rises now and then a sharp, clear note of artistic endeavor. The right ears, some day, will hear it as a few have heard.

II

The motion-picture, like so many modern things, begins—at least in Mr. Ramsaye’s version*—with Aristotle:

Aristotle in ancient Greece it was who first wrote down the observation that even a square hole in a shutter illumined by the sun cast a circular spot against the wall of a darkened room. He was only mildly curious about it. Natural science in his day consisted of noting oddities. Others of equal antiquity observed that the stone twirled by the slinger and the glowing light of a rapidly whirled firebrand both presented apparently continuous circles to the eye.

In those two primitive phenomena were hidden all the secrets of the motion picture. That hole in the wall of a chamber in Hellas was the pinhole aperture which cast a true image of the sun, and that darkened room was in truth a camera. (*Camera obscura*, indeed, is Italian for a darkened room.) The circles described by the whirling stone of the Balearic slinger and the firebrand

**A Million and One Nights Entertainment. A History of the Motion Pictures. Two Volumes.* Simon & Shuster.

were demonstrations of the principles of the persistence of vision.

We were to wait centuries for the camera, however. Alberti toyed with a device for casting a virtual image of an object upon a drawing board, thus enabling the artist to trace outlines. Leonardo advanced beyond Aristotle's circle of spot and found the camera obscura, by cutting a small circular hole in the shutter of a darkened room. He could case the image of a building or landscape on the opposite wall. It lacked but the invention of a sensitized plate to invent modern photography. The screen, however, in embryonic form, was destined to come before the plate. For in 1640 Athanasius Kircher, of Rome, gave the first showing of his *Magia Catoptrica*, by means of which he projected, from painted slides, pictures upon a wall. It was an unforgettable thrill for the leading citizens of the Holy City, foregathered at the Jesuit College, to witness Kircher's magic lantern; today that selfsame apparatus would be scorned by any self-respecting city tot. Leonardo lacked the sensitized plate; Kircher had the light, the picture, the screen, but lacked motion. The next important step was not to be taken for almost two hundred years. It was made by a gentleman whose name is only too familiar to all budding writers: Peter Mark Roget, compiler of the famous *Thesaurus*. Roget was a physician and a scientist; he was the inventor of a logarithmic slide rule; his epoch-making paper on *Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects*, read before the Royal Society of London in 1824, was engen-

dered not by a whirling firebrand or sling, but by the casual sight of a cart as caught through the slits of a Venetian blind. "Through the slitted apertures," writes Ramsaye, "the scientist caught the impression that the cart was proceeding by jerks. He saw it, despite its rapid motion, momentarily at rest in each slit, and, through each successive opening he saw it in a different phase of motion." Others carried the principle farther, notably Michael Faraday. By 1832, Ghent and Vienna knew the first motion picture machine; it was evolved, independently, by Messrs. Plateau and Stampfer, and consisted of handmade drawings on the rim of a disk, viewed through slits in another disk, blackened on the viewing side, and revolving on the same axis with the picture disk. Stampfer called his contraption "the Stroboscopic Disc"; Plateau christened his "the Phenakistoscope." Naturally the views were limited to one person at a time. Wherefore it occurred to an Austrian lieutenant, Baron Franz von Uchatius, that by combining the magic lantern principle with that of the stroboscope, he could project the illusion of motion upon a wall, for all to see. The first crude moving-picture machine had graduated to the screen. It still lacked the sensitized plate; the pictures were still the work of the human hand. Adaptations of the principle, among which the Zoetrope found widest favor, brought the disk principle closer to the populace, but did not advance the budding science.

The evolution of the cinema lay now in the field of photo-chemistry. By 1860 the wet

plate process of photography had been perfected. Colman Sellers, of Philadelphia, had conceived the notion of applying the principle of the persistence of vision to a series of specially posed photographs. He did not photograph motion, as is done today. He could not, since his plates naturally were unable to move fast enough. He did, however, select telling moments which, when run past the eye, would create the illusion of motion. Not only this, but he anticipated one of the dearest wishes of the modern experimenter by making his illusion stereoscopic—that is, seemingly three-dimensional. He used a twin-lensed camera; he mounted his prints on “a sort of paddle-wheel device in which they could be viewed by looking down on them through a stereoscope, while the paddle-wheel was being turned by hand.” This was the Kinematoscope, patented February 5, 1861, and is important as bringing the name *Kinema* for the first time into the tortured phraseology of motion pictures.

From now on the more or less conscious groping toward the motion picture as we know it today becomes fast and furious. With every advance, it is strange how the same curve is traced and re-traced, from individual view to screen projection. After Sellers, comes Heyl of Columbus, Ohio, with his Phasmatrope, an arrangement for throwing the Sellers photographs—minus the stereoscopic effect—upon the screen. There is another interesting thing to note in the early history of the screen, and this, too, comes in the nature of a curve re-traced. From the start there has been an at-

tempt to synchronize music with the visions, to produce the illusion of speaking presences, to get the impression of persons and things in the round. Heyl, moving in 1863 to Philadelphia, gave an exhibition in which waltz tunes from an orchestra managed to keep time with dancing figures. Soon Edison was to be attempting to use the phonograph in the same connection; yet it is only in our day that the Vitaphone has perfected the process.

Ramsaye punctures the Muybridge legend, according to which that gentleman was the American father of the moving picture. It appears that Edward Muybridge, in the famous episode of Leland Stanford's bet, was chiefly an agent, not a creator. The horse-fancier after whom is named California's proud university, had laid a wager that "at various gaits a horse at full speed took all of his four feet off the ground at once." The sum involved on either side was \$25,000. How prove or disprove the contention? It was Stanford who, in quest of photographic proof, hit upon Muybridge, who at first worked with the wet plate process. The plate was exposed as a horse was driven past the camera. Naturally the result was a blur, and Muybridge was on the verge of abandoning the project when he became involved in a murder. Declared not guilty, he disappeared for five years, and had been forgotten, when suddenly he returned to the old venture. During these five years photography had made vast strides and the new type of plate permitted very brief exposures. Yet even now the horse was too fast. Stanford

next thought of a row of cameras; it was tried, but technical difficulties were insurmountable. Finally, along came John D. Isaacs, who perfected a scheme involving electrical contacts with a battery of juxtaposed lenses. As a sulky rolled past, "the wheels closed the circuits successively and the magnetic releases set off the cameras." At first there had been five cameras, then twelve, then two dozen. By the time Stanford had achieved satisfactory results, he had invested some \$40,000. Muybridge began to ride on the crest of the fame which had come to him through his connection with the experiment. He had moving pictures here and but half knew it. No sooner had he learned a few things from French experimenters than he was visiting Edison, in 1886, exhibiting, as Edison afterward reported, "some pictures of a horse in motion." Nothing came of the visit.

During the same year Edison had perfected his phonograph and was thinking of a similar device for motion pictures; at first, in fact, he employed the cylinder idea. Edison's service, however, was to lie in a different direction. It was his dissatisfaction with the existing photographic plate that led indirectly to the great liberating influence of the celluloid film. The heavy, breakable glass plates were impracticable. The first celluloid sheets coated with photographic emulsion were also heavy, but the step had been made. Here was a continuous medium that could run behind the lens, which was opened and shut between eight and ten times per second. In 1889 the thin film of Eastman replaced the heavy, short strip of Car-

butt; Edison, hearing of it, sent his aid, Dickson, to Rochester to investigate. The die was cast.

As the individual photograph preceded the phonograph with horn attachment, as the earphone radio preceded the era of the loudspeaker, so did Edison's first moving-picture machine appeal to the private pair of eyes. It was the Kinetoscope, built in 1889, running a fifty-foot film over a spool bank. "It is provable," says Ramsaye in italics, "that there is not now and never has been subsequent to the year 1888 any motion picture film machine whatsoever of any relation to the screen art of today that is not descended by traceable steps from the Kinetoscope."

From this point the tale becomes too involved to permit of summary in a short article. Ramsaye has set it forth with journalistic graphicness, often more like a barker before the circus tent than like the student in his library, but never without interest. By far the most fascinating part of his account—and it has a genuine fascination, even when patently padded—is the major portion of the first volume. After Edison the tale veers from science to commerce. When, at last, after numerous and novel vicissitudes, the screen attains its majority, it falls into the hands of the industry that grows around it. Much of Ramsaye's account now turns on patent fights, on rivalry of producers. The possible art of the cinema which figures very slightly, if at all, in the beginning of his narrative, fades from his screen altogether. He is fascinated by the power of movie

potentates, by the size of checks, by the daring of manipulations. So writing, he but mirrors the history of the industry itself.

III

We come, then, through the rivalries of Latham of New York, Lumiere of France, Armat of Washington and Paul of London (each of whom availed himself of the Edison peep-show principle to throw the images upon a screen) to the art of the "movie." Today, more than thirty years after the first commercial screen showings, the much discussed future of the "movies" is still in the future. We hail colored films, talking-pictures and similar innovations with the curiosity of the child, yet all these were thought of and experimented with in the infancy of the trade. Stereoscopic projection lags far behind. Color films, as exemplified, let us say, by Douglas Fairbanks' *Black Pirate*, are still a trial to the eye, and far less satisfactory than the simple black and white. Talking pictures, as presented by the Vitaphone, are well on the way to commercial success. Both the color-movie and the speaking-picture suffer from a species of distortion. Screen colors are unnatural and therefore unconvincing. They tend to garishness and blurring. I recall, many years ago, a demonstration of what was called the Kinemacolor in the old Institute of Technology building, in Boston. Here, too, the colors were unnatural, but instead of a blur there was a too great

distinctness. Before the colored spectacle shall carry conviction much experimentation will be needed.

The Vitaphone is in different case. It has solved the problem of perfect synchronization. There is precise timing of image and sound, although the sound does not always seem to come from its source. Yet Hartinelli opens his mouth to sing from "Pagliacci" and every note corresponds to the right motion of lip and throat. Elman plays Dvorak's overworked "Humoresque" with similar conviction. Sometimes the illusion is well nigh perfect, as when Roy Smeck twangs his Hawaiian guitar or Will Hays makes his opening speech. The silly screen tale in which John Barrymore acts Don Juan is not a talking picture, but it runs off to music synchronized by the Vitaphone. No mis-cues, no hesitancy; the accompanying score, properly subdued, admirably replaces the usual scratch orchestra. Professional musicians have reason to fear this unlooked-for competition. The Vitaphone, from present indications, will truly revolutionize the movies by making them "speakies" as well. Already it gives vaudeville acts, musical acts, monologues. What is more, it does not have to record the musical accompaniment to a picture at the same time that the picture is being filmed. By means of special mechanism it can adapt any music to any film in perfect rhythm to the progress of the picture.

Of course, a purist might question whether color or sound belonged in the best pictures. The art of the cinema, if we may obtrude such

a notion, is one of shapes, designs, composition. Plot, as in a good book, is really a secondary consideration, just as in a painting the story-element is superfluous. The better directors have realized this. They imitate the painters in their search for design and composition; they avoid preaching and purposiveness as they avoid the pest; they seek rhythm and harmony, even counterpoint, of motion and motif. There is a fine bit of imagination at the beginning of the picture *Silence*, in which a man about to be hanged is urged to speak before the fatal noose is tightened. He looks at the clock that is ticking his life away and the pendulum, as it swings, turns into a swinging noose; his own swaying takes up the same metronomic cure; a pealing bell chimes in with the selfsame sway; the pendulum suddenly becomes a swinging ball and chain, until at last the man is madly confused, whereupon pendulum, ball and chain, bell and noose swing wildly across the vision in a highly effective counterpoint of motifs. Here were raw materials in significant motion. No plot for that moment, yet it was the most telling part of the picture.

The future of the screen as art lies in the direction of imaginative scenery, significant miming, photography that shall be at once materially and creatively illuminative. Against anything like finer developments there is the horde that pays the monstrous salaries of stars and magnates. Here, as everywhere else, Demo is at its endless game of stubbing its own toe. Of late there has been talk of establishing Little Movie Theaters, somewhat in the nature

of the Little Theatres that played so great a part in educating public taste and large-scale production. To such experimental ventures, to the Germany that gave us *Variety* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, to the Russia of *Potemkin*, we look for something that shall afford us relief from the miles and miles of spectacular rubbish that holds the continents in thrall. Thirty years is too long to have waited for the fulfilment of the movies' educational claims, for the emergence of an art born of light and motion and form. Let there be plot-interest; but let the emotional substructure of plot determine the subtleties of scene, tempo, climax. Give us this and we can well spare the realistic accessories of color and sound. Pleasing—even exciting—as these novelties are, they yet remain at best a subordinate element. The motion picture today lags far behind its means. Producers, directors, and a few actors are well aware of the situation. Some of them confess their helplessness before the crude demands of the populace. And if, with all your optimism, you wish to feel something of the dubiousness with which, at the moment, I write, just plant yourself, as I have done, before a metropolitan movie house as its portals swing open toward the end of the show. Watch the faces on the emerging crowd: get their average age; listen to their average conversation. If the "movies" are to move—and undoubtedly they have made headway during these past three decades—they'll have to mow down these throngs. They will not do it.

The movie intelligentsia, like the others, will

content itself with experiment and occasional satisfactions. It is, as a general rule, safe to assume that we shall have art when it does not interfere with profits. If only, as we used to do for good plays, we could go quietly up some back alley and be alone with our pleasure—and the bad odors! Meantime, let us howl our disapproval out of a sense of civic duty and personal relief, and wish for the best!

